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Monday, 4 October 1999, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Gurirab (Namibia)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Baali (Algeria), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Agenda item 106

Social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family: follow-up to the International Year of Older Persons

Report of the Secretary-General (A/54/268)

Draft resolution (A/54/L.6)

Mr. Enkhsaikhan (Mongolia): My delegation believes that the commemoration of the International Year of Older Persons — with the theme "Towards a society for all ages" and on the eve of the next millennium — is an event of special significance. The United Nations and its relevant organizations, Member States, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations — in short, the entire international community — are actively celebrating this Year by taking concrete measures to make a difference for the elderly today and in the years to come. And there are well-founded reasons for that.

For example, according to the United Nations the population growth trend is such that by 2025, when the global population will have reached 8.2 billion, and the number of elderly will have reached 1.1 billion, thus constituting a considerable portion of the world's population. This phenomenon should be welcomed as a sign that in general life expectancies and standards of living are increasing, though, unfortunately, not evenly throughout the world.

The impact of this phenomenon on the socio-economic conditions of societies is already presenting challenges to Governments. It is in response to this phenomenon and challenge that the General Assembly decided to observe the International Year of Older Persons, the primary objective of which is to raise awareness of the fast-changing demographic global picture, with its challenges, and to develop and pursue appropriate strategies and policies at the national, subregional, regional and international levels.

My delegation takes this opportunity to commend the Secretariat for the work it has done so that this Year could be meaningfully celebrated. We note with appreciation the Secretary-General's comprehensive report (A/54/268), which provides us with a clear overview of the progress achieved in the field of addressing the questions connected with ageing and the challenges that lie ahead. The report highlights the activities undertaken at all levels.

The highlights of the expert consultation on developing a policy framework for a society for all ages annexed to the report, try to present a possible new "architecture of ageing", combining strategic thinking with pragmatic measures. We believe that Governments

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and appropriate organizations will find this document not only interesting and thought-provoking but also quite useful.

Since time immemorial Mongolians have revered their elders. This has found reflection in our well-known proverb: "Teachings of elders are priceless". This is why the Constitution of Mongolia makes special reference to elders. It states that every citizen of Mongolia has the right to receive financial and material assistance in old age. This provision of the Constitution provides a legal basis for the care of older people.

Mongolia's population is relatively young. The elderly constitute about 8 per cent of the population. Nevertheless, they still need our special attention and care, especially today. The reason is that, like many other countries undergoing fundamental changes, Mongolia is grappling with the challenges of the transition period.

In Mongolia market reforms have been boldly accelerated by the liberalization of trade and prices, large-scale privatization and other economic measures. However, the reform process has not been without difficulties. And these difficulties are directly affecting the lives of our people, especially those of the elderly and other vulnerable sections of society. The income — that is, the pensions — of the elderly has shrunk enormously on account of inflation and price increases. Pensions are at or even below the minimum subsistence level and thus are not sufficient to meet the basic needs of normal life. Though pensions have been raised in the past, the increases were soon overtaken by inflation and price hikes. The present Government is contemplating raising pensions further.

Bearing in mind the difficult situation of older people, the State and Government are taking some legal and administrative measures to alleviate their burdens. Thus, the Government bears the expenses for health insurance for older people, as well as their long-distance travel expenses incurred in connection with medical treatment. Also, older people are entitled to obtain soft loans for the improvement of their housing conditions. Those living in the capital city are exempted from city bus fares. As a result of privatization, many rural older people have benefited from the privatization of livestock. Special care and protection are provided to lonely people and to those who are incapable of leading an independent life. They are lodged in special care centres and are provided with free meals and clothing. However, these measures are not sufficient to alleviate the burdens of older people. Much still needs to be done.

In celebrating the International Year of Older Persons, the Government of Mongolia has declared 1999 as the National Year of Older Persons, and it is taking concrete measures to address the problems that they face in Mongolia. Thus, a national committee has been established and has adopted a comprehensive national and local plan, which is being implemented. The Year and other relevant activities are also being widely promoted through the mass media.

The Government of Mongolia recently launched the 1999-2004 National Programme for the health and social welfare of older persons. One of the ways of improving the living standards of older persons is to provide a realistic opportunity for post-retirement employment and thus enable older people to earn additional income. The recent amendments to key socially oriented legislative acts create a more favourable legal and administrative environment and also create conditions for promoting social welfare and expanding sources of income for older people. In addition, the Government has budgeted some financial assistance for older people who are actively engaged in small- and medium-scale businesses and cooperatives.

Despite all the support given by the Government and some non-governmental organizations to older people, poverty still, unfortunately, hits them hard. It would take some time and considerable economic progress to really alleviate the hardships of older people. However, the celebration of the International Year is in some respects helping reduce hardships and to raise awareness of the problems involved and the challenges that lie ahead.

Respecting elders is one of the notable traits of our traditional society and culture. We always respect and value the constructive roles older people play in society, including their role in the family, organizations, politics and well-being. As pointed out in the Secretary-General's report, Mongolia is taking measures to make appropriate use of the skills and wisdom of retirees, as well as encouraging older persons to share their life and work experience with the younger generation.

Finally, as a sponsor of the draft resolution on this item, my delegation expresses the hope that it will be adopted without a vote, just as have been similar resolutions in previous years.

Mr. Shen Guofang (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): The Chinese delegation supports the statement made by the

representative of Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

In 1992, at its forty-seventh session, the General Assembly adopted a resolution designating the year 1999 as the International Year of Older Persons. This was indicative of the fact that the problem of population ageing has become a major global issue and is attracting wide concern and attention from the international community. We are heartened to note that in the years since the 1982 World Assembly on Ageing, the United Nations has taken a series of positive steps that have helped make the international community pay more attention to the issue of population ageing. The decision of the United Nations to make the last year of the millennium the International Year of Older Persons, and its relevant activities at various levels throughout the world, are of great significance in further drawing the attention of the entire world to the issue of ageing. They are providing a strong impetus for countries around the world to make efforts to address the issue and for the implementation of the United Nations Principles for Older Persons.

As a result of progress in the economic, scientific and technological, educational, cultural and health areas in China and improvements in the standards of living of the Chinese people, the average life expectancy of the Chinese people has been rising and has now reached approximately 70 years of age. Therefore, both the absolute number of elderly Chinese and the percentage of our overall population that is elderly are on the rise. It is projected that by the year 2020 there will be 230 million elderly people in China, accounting for 15.6 per cent of the overall population. The size of this population is expected to continue to rise, reaching 410 million by the year 2050. By then, the elderly will make up 27.4 per cent of the overall population. That means that one out of every four people will be elderly.

Such a huge elderly population and its rapid growth will pose a severe challenge to a country such as China, whose economy is still not very developed. The Chinese Government has made the issue a high priority and has taken action in the areas of legislation and social welfare. We formulated the China development plan of action on ageing. In this plan we set specific goals for our work so as to ensure that elderly people will be supported, enjoy medical care, contribute to society, engage in lifelong learning and live happily.

Gradually a social-welfare system suited to Chinese conditions is taking shape. This system integrates the role of the Government, the community, the family and the individual. To date we have been successful in trying out this programme.

The Chinese Government vigorously supported the United Nations resolution naming this year the International Year of Older Persons. We also supported other relevant resolutions of the Organization. On 28 October 1998, on behalf of the State Council and President Jiang Zemin, Vice-President Hu Jin Tao made a nationwide televised speech on the commemoration of the International Year. This helped to publicize the International Year and its theme of "a society for all ages".

The State Council issued a circular to departments and ministries under its authority and to local Governments at various levels, calling upon them to organize commemorative activities. The response to date has been very active. At the State level, the coordinating agency for such activities, the China National Committee on Ageing, played an active role in this regard. Large numbers of national and local non-governmental organizations, organizations of the elderly and the media, and many private associations have carried out commemorative activities. In addition, the Chinese Government is working diligently on the report of the People's Republic of China on ageing and will soon submit it to the United Nations. The report will further detail China's commemorative activities for the International Year.

Humanity is moving towards a new millennium, in which the ageing of the population will become a major social issue. It is a particularly complex question for the developing countries. We call on the United Nations to take even more meaningful measures to enrich and strengthen the work of relevant United Nations bodies and agencies and to offer more technological assistance and support to developing countries, especially those with a large population that is ageing at an accelerated rate. We are confident that, with the concerted efforts of the entire international community, humanity will surely usher in a society for all ages.

Mr. Aboul Gheit (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): It is my pleasure to speak on this glorious occasion in celebration of the International Year of Older Persons, not only out of gratitude to those who have devoted their experience, energies and lives to the service of society, but also out of our belief that their continuous generosity and accumulated expertise will greatly contribute to a

brighter future. I wish to associate myself with the statement made by the representative of Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

There is no doubt that comprehensive care for the elderly is a noble goal that we must seek to achieve either through official institutions and associated authorities and agencies, or through the voluntary services of popular and civil organizations, or by activating and enhancing the direct role of the family or foster families in caring for the elderly. Increased awareness of and improved health care for older persons have indeed raised life expectancy to rates far higher than those of the past, leading to an exponential increase in the proportion of older persons to other age groups in Egyptian society. Statistics show similar rates for men and women.

In Egypt, we use age as an objective criterion for defining older persons. We do not use the subjective criteria of the symptoms of ageing, with all its related health problems and social implications. This may differ from criteria used in other countries. Thus, we consider anyone over the age of 60 to be an older person.

Our Government bases its policy for achieving a dignified life for older persons on our tolerant religious beliefs and social values, which have been rooted in Egyptian society since time immemorial. In implementing our policies, we resort to many tools, including coordination between the institutions that can play fundamental or auxiliary roles in the provision of services or patterns of care or support for the elderly, with a view to maximizing the benefits derived from our social policies in this regard.

The Egyptian Government, represented by the Ministry of Social Security and Social Affairs, supports civil and voluntary work by providing financial contribution or necessary technical support to voluntary societies with a view to involving them in the comprehensive plan for the care of older persons. Egypt is conducting a vast campaign to increase older person's awareness of their rights. We have been collecting categorized data on older persons and cataloguing all relevant legislations to use as benchmarks in this regard.

The Government draws on the skills of experts and specialists in the field of psychotherapy for the elderly in order to prepare them psychologically and socially to accept their ageing. We have been modernizing state services offered to various social groups, especially those dealing with health care for older persons. We have increased the number of offices for home services to older persons and built new, modern nursing homes for those who are unable to help themselves medically or financially. Under the theme "a society for developed a programme to establish links between young and older persons with a view to achieving continuity between generations through joint activities that promote interaction and integration of all age groups.

Given the importance we attach to the question of older persons at the international level, Egypt has participated with the international community in the celebrating the International Year of Older Persons. The Government has developed a plan that will be fully implemented by the end of October 1999. We have promoted the International Year of Older Persons in all mass media — audio, visual and written. We have also issued a commemorative stamp on the occasion of the International Year and a guide for services available to retirees and senior citizens. The Government has organized seminars to discuss the current situation of older persons and their physical, psychological and social problems, in addition to enhancing the active role that they themselves can play in developing their society by providing support to families, which are the nuclei of the community, and in other fields to which older persons can contribute.

There is no doubt that national efforts cannot work in a vacuum. In order to be fruitful, those efforts must result in a favourable international climate supported by technical expertise and financial resources. In this regard, I would be remiss if I failed to thank the Secretary-General for his report in document A/54/268, entitled "International Year of Older Persons, 1999: activities and legacies". The report assesses United Nations efforts reflecting the prominent place enjoyed by older persons on the international development agenda. We note with appreciation that the report stresses four fields that are intrinsically related to the welfare of older persons: the situation of older persons, lifelong individual development, multi-generational relationships and population ageing and development.

In this regard, I would like to pay tribute to the constructive role played by the United Nations system in all these fields, whether by organizing seminars or providing financial and technical assistance to States. We call on the United Nations to continue these efforts, without which States cannot implement their national plans successfully.

A productive and favourable international climate cannot be provided without the concerted efforts and the will of all members of the international community, be they States or organizations. In addition to United Nations efforts to provide a coordinating framework and carry out joint action — and we do welcome its activities in this field — we believe that individual countries are responsible for activating such collective action by providing material and technical resources.

We must not overlook the adverse effects experienced by developing countries as a result of the phenomenon of globalization, which impede those countries' implementation of their development plans and their efforts to raise the living standards of their citizens in a world characterized by a widening gap between the rich and the poor. The numbers of the rich increase; the "haves" have more and the "have-nots" have less.

International cooperation must acquire a new dimension that makes the "haves" more responsible, so that the fabric of international society does not disintegrate. Under these adverse conditions, the developed countries, more than ever, must abide by their pledges to development efforts, including maintaining their official development assistance levels.

Mr. Rahman (Malaysia): I feel honoured to be able to participate in this meeting of the Assembly on the subject of the ageing population, which I am sure is of increasing concern to all of us. My delegation congratulates the United Nations on its persistent and tireless efforts for the past three decades, culminating in the designation of this year, 1999, as the International Year of Older Persons. It is indeed a timely wake-up call for the international community to evolve a paradigm shift and change of mindset on this important issue of the emerging phenomena of individuals living longer, leading to the growing upward trend of ageing in the population of the world.

The empowerment of women, with an expanded access to education and employment, and the advent of science and technology with its attendant improvements in health care and lifestyle, have led to a world demographic transition in mortality and fertility rate declines, while life expectancy is continuously on the rise. These phenomena present a new set of challenges and opportunities to all nations. Their impact on macroeconomic policies and on social and sustainable development, though obvious, requires a further in-depth and integrated study and analysis.

The needs of the elderly are basically the same as those of other generations: food, shelter, jobs, education and the protection of legal rights. However, they also require opportunities and support systems to enable them to enjoy income generation, social security and health care. The challenge for Governments now is how to incorporate and reflect these new, greater needs in their resource allocations, services and legal and other related institutional frameworks.

The elderly generation should not be viewed as a depreciating asset, as, with a proper set of policies in place, they can continue to lead rich and useful lives and contribute positively to the community.

The approach and response to this challenge of the elderly population may certainly differ from country to country, as each is governed by its own set of traditions, norms and values, but the common overriding concern is to extend care and love.

Traditionally, Malaysian society, with its inherent religious beliefs and Eastern social values, extends its care and love to the elderly. However, with the empowerment of women, rising economic well-being and urbanization, there is already a decline in the number of extended family units. It is in this context that the Government, together with the private sector, non-governmental organizations and the community at large, may have to actively intervene.

By the year 2000 the majority of the world's older persons, roughly 51 per cent, will reside in urban areas. In the developed countries, about 78 per cent of elderly women and 75 per cent of elderly men will be in urban areas, whereas in the developing countries the majority of the older persons of both genders will remain in the rural areas. Today, when the world population has already reached 6 billion, 1 in every 10 persons is 60 years of age or older. By 2030 more than 1.4 billion persons will be over 60 years old, most of them in Asia and the Pacific region. By the year 2050 one out of five persons, and by the year 2150 one out of three, will be over the age of 60. These demographic projections entail an urgent need for effective collaboration between Governments, international institutions and private organizations to formulate an integrated line of action so as to ensure that this segment of society is not excluded, marginalized or made into an underclass, but taken into the mainstream of national life.

In Malaysia it is estimated that by the year 2000 about 6.1 per cent of the population, or 1.4 million persons, will be age 60 and above. Demographic projection anticipates that by the year 2020 the number of elderly in Malaysia will rise to 3.2 million persons, or 9.5 per cent of its population. It is in the context of this population trend that, on 25 October 1995, the Malaysian Government formulated the National Policy on the Elderly. The policy, *inter alia*, incorporates self-respect and honour; self-reliance; participation in life, care and protection; and research and development for the well-being of the elderly as the main thrust of its strategy, which is in line with the five categories of the United Nations Principles for Older Persons: independence, participation, care, self-fulfilment and dignity.

In implementing the international Plan of Action on Ageing, adopted at the World Assembly on Ageing, held in Vienna in 1982, the Malaysian Government has also approved the setting up of the National Advisory and Consultative Council for the Elderly and the Plan of Action on the National Policy for the Elderly. The Plan of Action is comprehensive and contains proposals for action, as well as programmes and activities, that need to be implemented by all governmental agencies, the private sector, non-governmental organizations, society, groups and individuals. These programmes and activities cover education, employment, participation in society, well-being, transportation, housing, family support systems, health, social security, the media and research and development.

Malaysia has been observing the International Day of Older Persons every year since 1991. Several programmes were held to mark the day and to highlight the issue of ageing, with the aim of raising awareness at the multi-generational level in order to promote active participation and networking.

Malaysia sees the preparation of the entire population for the later stages of life as an integral part of its social and economic development policy framework. Notwithstanding the empowerment of women, which has expanded access to education, employment and family decision-making processes, thus leading to an increase in nuclear families, lower fertility and mortality rates and longer life expectancy, Malaysia is taking effective steps to ensure that family ties and values are maintained and that caring for the elderly continues to be the family's responsibility.

Malaysia also encourages offspring to take care of their elderly. Since 1992 it has provided tax relief for them. Under the Malaysian public sector new remuneration scheme, medical benefits for public sector employees are being extended to their parents. The Government, both on its own together with non-governmental organizations, has also provided homes for this group. The future design of low-cost housing will accommodate the needs of extended families.

The action plan to implement the national policy for the elderly will heed the features of this International Year of Older Persons. For the first decade of the new millennium, the Government of Malaysia has established the Second Malaysian Economic Consultative Council, comprising 150 members representing the political parties, non-governmental organizations, the private sector, professional bodies and minority groups whose policy inputs will include ageing population needs in the context of human resource development, science and technology, poverty eradication, social engineering and national unity.

At the international level, Malaysia has participated actively in conferences focusing on the elderly. The latest was the Fourth Global Conference of the International Federation of Ageing, held from 5 to 9 September 1999 in Montreal, Canada, in conjunction with the International Year of Older Persons.

Malaysia will continue to take cognizance of changes in the characteristics and expectations of the elderly, such as the need for greater financial and personal independence, as well as developing a relationship of mutual reliance rather than dependency in its planning for the elderly. The Government is considering a request by the public service union that the mandatory age of retirement be increased from the current 55 to 58. There are now plans to provide programmes for upgrading the skills of older persons to ensure that they can continue to be a productive part of society. To alleviate the financial strain on the Government, there are also proposals to develop a private sector safety net and medical care system for the group.

The theme of the International Year of Older Persons is "Towards a society for all ages". My delegation believes this is rightly so. For every nation in this new economy of knowledge and human capital, the component of the elderly group is never fully depreciated. They are indeed a valuable asset deserving generational equity.

Malaysia is confident that this wake-up call from the United Nations will bring a message of hope and fulfilment to the older citizens of the world as they and the rest of the 6 billion population of the world brace themselves for the challenges of the new century and the new millennium.

Mr. Ngo Quang Xuan (Viet Nam): Seven years ago, in 1992, the General Assembly decided to designate 1999 as the International Year of Older Persons. This decision shows not only a clear vision for the promotion of a society for all ages, but also our strong commitment to its implementation as we enter a new millennium. Now is the right time for us to take stock of what has been done and look ahead to see what we can further do to accomplish this noble cause.

In every part of the world the situation of the ageing depends not only on their individual development, but also very much on the social policy of the State, the socio-economic situation of the country and the family. Due to their age and health conditions, older persons belong to a social group with special needs. Under difficult circumstances, such as economic or financial crises or transformation, they become more vulnerable.

In my country, older people account for 10 per cent of the population. It is an age-old tradition, treasured by the whole society, that older people are respected and taken care of, because they represent living wisdom. In our present State policy, older people are looked upon as a generation which has made a great contribution to our magnificent national history. They are also glorified for having delivered, raised and educated younger generations to continue the cause of national defence and construction. Article 67 of our Constitution stipulates clearly that old people shall receive State assistance. According to the law on marriage and the family, the primary responsibility for taking care of older people is entrusted to their own families. The State, through its local mechanism, provides concrete assistance, such as financial subsidies, housing and medical care. The Vietnamese Association of Older Persons, established four years ago, has a network at the communal level which covers almost 90 per cent of the country's communes. This is a mass organization, whose main functions are to help take care of the material and spiritual life of older persons and to engage them in the political, social and cultural activities of the local community.

In such a national context, Viet Nam has fully embraced the core concepts and strategies originating from the World Assembly on Ageing in 1982 which have guided observance of the International Year of Older Persons. On 30 September 1998 the Prime Minister adopted the instructions on the observation of the International Year of Older Persons in Viet Nam. These governmental instructions set out targets to be achieved on education on the significance and objectives of the International Year and the adoption of updated regulations and policies on care for older people. This document also defined the duties of the Ministries concerned, as well as coordination between them.

A national committee in charge of the organization of the International Year in Viet Nam has been set up and is chaired by a Deputy Prime Minister. The Committee is responsible for organizing a nationwide programme to promote awareness of the significance of the International Year, as well as of international and national research achievements with regard to health and other care for older persons. The committee has worked out and has been directing the implementation of a national action plan for the observance of the International Year, aimed at promoting a happy, healthy and useful life of the older people in Viet Nam, encouraging the elderly to participate in communal activities and hailing and multiplying the good practices and positive achievements of individuals and organizations in taking care of the older people. Implementation of the national action plan is focused on the following: activities to show respect for and love to older persons, health care and medical treatment, upholding the older person's role in each family and the whole society, and responding to their quest for knowledge improvement and recreational activities in accordance with their age.

During the International Year, the Association of Vietnamese Older People has given particular attention to: encouraging its members at all levels to study, and make contributions through the Association to, the draft Ordinance on the Care for Older People; reviewing and assessing the implementation of the Prime Minister's instructions on the observance of the International Year; and stepping up a nationwide movement of distinguished older persons and preparing for a national meeting of distinguished older persons from all walks of life, which will elect representatives to attend the Conference of National Heroes to be convened by the Government at the end of the year 2000.

Given severe constraints in the State budget, the Government of Viet Nam has shouldered most of the research spending on ageing and has striven to improve,

step by step, the basic social services to all, including the elderly. The Government has also tried very hard to promote the awareness and willingness of every individual, family and organization with regard to their responsibility to protect and take care of older people. This has been done through the State educational system, as well as the propaganda programme carried out by the Association of Older Persons. In other words, there is a strong partnership between the Government and society through the non-governmental organizations working for the welfare of older people in Viet Nam.

Looking ahead, in view of the fast changes in the nature and scope of demographic ageing, we do share the view that we need to further promote investments in human development over the entire lifespan and support age-integrated social institutions. It is very important to reach out to the younger generation to help foster multi-generational relationships and to encourage the young to see beyond the traditional stereotypes of older persons and gain a more positive image of the ageing process and its effects. Another important area is improvement in research and exchange of information on ageing. We expect that the International Year of Older Persons will provide us with the impetus for a society truly for all ages in the next century.

Ms. Takamura (United States of America): A year ago the United Nations inaugurated the International Year of Older Persons. While the year has yet to draw to a close, it is fitting that we gather today to honour the past and envision the future.

The International Year of Older Persons has provided us with a unique opportunity. It has compelled us to pay more than the usual attention to changing world demographic trends, to consider the opportunities and challenges that emerge as a consequence, to envision our world in the next millennium, to encourage the development of an architecture for longevity and to stimulate our public and private sectors alike to engage in the development of a progressive ageing policy and programme proposals. Thus, we thank the United Nations for this special year.

I am pleased to report that during the International Year of Older Persons we have given strong emphasis in the United States to essential policy and programme discussions to prepare for population longevity in anticipation of the twenty-first century. A launching event was held last October in New York City by the United States Committee to celebrate the International Year of Older Persons. In December, we will formally close the International Year in Washington, D.C., with a special event sponsored by the United States Department of Health and Human Services, the United States Committee and others. However, our policy and programme discussions will continue well into the future.

Last February, at the Commission for Social Development, our delegation reported on a host of federal activities to commemorate the Year. For example, the Department of Labor will hold a national conference on senior community service and employment. The Department of Transportation is sponsoring an international conference on "Transportation for an Aging Society" preceded by town-hall meetings in communities across the United States and Canada. The United States Food and Drug Administration formed a special agency-wide committee to offer activities and special informational materials aimed at older adults.

In addition, the Federal Committee for the International Year of Older Persons, chaired by the Administration on Ageing in the United States Department of Health and Human Services, convened a symposium in June which brought together nearly 300 senior administrators from across the executive branch to address the policy and programme implications of our rapidly ageing society. The symposium established a foundation to advance United States federal policy and programme agenda for older persons and their families in the twenty-first century, focusing specifically upon issues related to economic security, ageing in place, older people serving as resources, health promotion and care and disability and long-term care. During the symposium, we forged new partnerships to inform our policy and programme endeavours in the future. This unique federal-Government-wide committee will continue its work into the next century to encourage innovative and collaborative, inter-agency partnerships.

Communities across America have also wholeheartedly embraced the International Year of Older Persons. Our Governors have proclaimed the observance of the International Year within their states. A number of state agencies on ageing — in Illinois, North Carolina and California, for example — have developed resource kits filled with ideas for the International Year. National church groups, such as the Presbyterian Church's Office on Older Adult Ministry and the United Methodist Committee on Older Adult Ministry, have developed resource guides for congregations with older adults. National ageing and non-ageing organizations have

dedicated their annual conferences and their publications to the International Year of Older Persons and to the theme "Towards a society for all ages". New York, California, Michigan and Tennessee produced public service announcements about the International Year and established Internet sites to describe their activities. South Carolina used the year-long observance to highlight the special contributions that older persons make to enriching their towns and states. The Pennsylvania Department on Ageing joined its area agencies on ageing and other Commonwealth departments and agencies and organizations to generate more than 500 events during the Year. One area agency on ageing offered special grants to public and private schools to establish inter-generational programmes or events. Universities, hospitals, schools, private companies and senior centres all across the United States have all found meaningful ways to observe the Year. And of course a number of states participated in the Global Walk, held only a few days ago. These are but a few examples illustrating the United States commitment to the goals of the Year.

As the International Year of Older Persons draws to a close, we are mindful of the need to continue the momentum which it began. We will continue to draw upon the support of multiple partners from the Government sector, private industries, the non-profit community, the media and educational institutions, just to name a few. We have an urgent need in the United States and globally to prepare our nations for population longevity and to ensure that our peoples all have ample opportunity to plan for a longer life course and an improved quality of life.

In closing, I would like to quote Donna Shalala, our Secretary of Health and Human Services. At the symposium we held last June she said,

> "As the theme of the International Year tells us, our mission is to help build a society of all ages — a society where participation and independence and self-fulfilment and character and dignity aren't just lofty principles but a way of life for every older American."

This is our wish for all nations and for our brothers and sisters with whom we share the planet.

Mr. Ramsaran (Trinidad and Tobago): I am indeed pleased and privileged to participate in these plenary meetings of the General Assembly on the follow-up to the International Year of Older Persons. I also wish to associate myself with the statement of Guyana, made on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

The aged have worked long and hard, and to ignore them would be the worst kind of cruelty. We need to integrate them into society and involve them in all aspects of the developmental process of our nations. They have much to offer and we need to receive the treasures they hold. The designation of 1999 as the International Year of Older Persons gives the international community the opportunity to focus effectively on this unprecedented phenomenon of population ageing and its implications globally, regionally and nationally.

It is anticipated that between the years 2000 and 2050 the world population could increase by 54 per cent overall, by 241 per cent for persons over the age of 65 and by 380 per cent for persons over 80. Furthermore, the majority of older persons live in developing countries, and it is estimated that their population will exceed 70 per cent by the year 2030.

Trinidad and Tobago is also faced with an unprecedented growth in its population aged 60 years and over. The results of our 1990 population census indicate that 8.5 per cent of our population is over 60 years of age. This figure is projected to increase by 13.9 per cent by the year 2000, slightly higher than our overall population increase. Further projections indicate that by the year 2020 their numbers are expected to increase to 15 per cent of the population. Our projections for life expectancy assume rates of 70.62 for males and 74.7 for females by the year 2010. The population growth of older persons can be expected to be even higher with the new trend of return migration. A recent survey of return migrants indicates that approximately 18.4 per cent of returning migrants were 60 years old and over.

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago has adopted the United Nations conceptual framework for observing the International Year of Older Persons, which identified its theme as "Towards a society for all ages". This theme was developed and integrated into the operational framework and the four dimensions identified were "Raising awareness: the society for all ages", "Looking ahead beyond 1999", "Reaching out: non-traditional actors" and "Networking: research and information exchange".

In Trinidad and Tobago, a national coordinating committee comprised of representatives of governmental, non-governmental and private sector organizations was

constituted to plan activities to observe the Year. The Year was officially launched on 30 September 1998 by the Prime Minister, The Honourable Basdeo Panday, at a cultural function which recognized the contributions to society of outstanding older persons.

To raise awareness about the theme and the objectives of the Year, numerous activities have been conducted locally. The main ones include the publication of several articles in the print media containing relevant issues on older persons; the distribution of information packages to media houses, non-governmental organizations and local Government bodies for further dissemination; the launching of a public awareness week; the sensitization of the public via radio and television programmes and the airing of a specially commissioned music video entitled "Blessed Are the Elders"; a holding of a conference on the issues associated with active ageing hosted by the University of the West Indies; the conducting of health clinics and fairs for older persons by both governmental and non-governmental agencies; and radio interviews with senior citizens. A Web site on issues relating to older persons is in the process of being established. This year the International Day of Older Persons focused on the honouring of centenarians, in addition to which the Ministry of Social and Community Development hosted a luncheon for older persons.

Initiatives have also been taken to achieve an age-integrated society. These include the introduction of neighbourhood day-care services. For this initiative, young persons trained in geriatric care provide daily care services to needy older persons in various communities throughout the country. In an effort to build inter-generational relationships, summer camps were conducted in Tobago for children between the ages of 8 to 14 years of age, with retired older persons serving as facilitators. Training courses were also organized for care-givers for older persons. These courses targeted care-givers at institutions and also those who provide care to older relatives and friends at family residences.

In looking ahead, and with regard to research, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago is currently conducting a national survey of the living conditions of older persons. This seeks to collect data on the economic-psycho-social conditions of the elderly in Trinidad and Tobago and the physical conditions under which they live. We expect to do an evaluation of the needs of the elderly based on the survey data and to analyse the impact of the projected growth in this population sub-group on health-care needs, human resource development, housing, change in family circumstances and the provision of social services.

This year, the Government again increased the quantum of non-contributory old age pension to persons 65 years old and over. Approximately 60,000 persons benefit from this financial support. Furthermore, the income ceiling for pension eligibility was increased, allowing additional numbers of senior citizens to benefit. National insurance retirees enjoyed higher pensions with the introduction of new measures under the national insurance scheme at no additional costs to senior citizens. The 1998-1999 appropriation bill proposed to soften the costs of pharmaceuticals for certain illnesses which are mainly suffered by the aged.

Apart from economic and social security benefits, the Government provides housing and transportation relief for needy senior citizens. This year, a facility was introduced through the National Commission for Self-help to undertake repairs to houses of needy senior citizens utilizing non-governmental organizations or community-based organizations as monitoring and implementing agencies. Financial contributions to nine Government-assisted homes for the aged were also increased.

An area of grave concern is the care of older persons. I am pleased to say that, at present, the Ministries of Health, Social and Community Development, and Planning and Development are collaborating on the introduction of a programme of community care that will incorporate ageing-in-place programmes and home-care for senior citizens.

The International Year of Older Persons has challenged us to review and initiate policies to ensure that we promote the United Nations Principles for Older Persons. Under the auspices of the Ministry of Social and Community Development, a Committee has been established to develop a national policy on ageing before the end of 1999. That policy will deal with the challenges presented by this demographic revolution and with the innovative strategies and programmes required to respond to the heterogeneity of the population of older persons, their needs and expectations. It will of necessity focus on an integrated approach to the lifelong and society-wide process of ageing, the effects of globalization and the information explosion in order to realize a society for all ages.

At the regional level, Trinidad and Tobago has endorsed the Caribbean Charter on Health and Ageing.

The components of this Charter include "Creating Supportive Environments for Older Persons at Home, in the Community and in Long-Term-Care Facilities"; "Primary Health Care and Health Promotion"; and "Economic Security, Employment and Other Productive Activities for Healthy Ageing".

In the area of best practices for a society for all ages, Trinidad and Tobago has introduced several programmes in this respect. These include the Geriatric/Adolescent Partnership Programme; the Adopt-an-Elderly/Adopt-a-Home Programme; and the Retiree/Adolescent Partnership Programme. A Senior Citizens Bureau has also been established, and talk shows aimed at creating linkages between younger and older persons will soon be produced. Another initiative of the non-governmental sector is the creation of peer support groups intended to build solidarity among older persons.

Without doubt, much more is required to promote this vision of active and healthy lifelong ageing. There is a need to incorporate ageing modules in our school curriculum. If we are to truly create a "society for all ages", we need to target our youth and equip them with new knowledge so that they can reach their own later years as the beneficiaries of good health, income security and supportive social networks. We need to introduce formal training in gerontology at the tertiary level, and revisit issues of gender inequality, particularly as we recognize the tendency for women to live longer than men and their expanding role as a result of urbanization, migration and the high incidence of HIV/AIDS.

Let me assure the Assembly that the issue of ageing has been placed high on the agenda of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. Only recently my Government, at the parliamentary level, participated in the Latin American and Caribbean Symposium on Older Persons, held from September 8-10, in Santiago, Chile.

We recognize that there is an urgent need to put in place the required measures to deal with this unprecedented and rapidly occurring phenomenon. I look forward to the contributions of my colleagues at these memorable plenary meetings and to share experiences and best practices to promote the interests of our older persons and to prepare society and the world as we enter the new millennium. This is important for future generations of senior citizens, a group towards which I myself am progressing.

Mr. Ka (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): First of all, I should like to associate myself with the statement made by the representative of Guyana, speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

In Africa, there is a saying that an old person dying is like a library burning. This alone reflects the importance that African societies attach to older persons.

My delegation welcomes the excellent report of the Secretary-General on the activities and legacies of the International Year of Older Persons. It provides a wealth of facts about older persons and multi-generational relationships in the world, and it suggests a strategic, holistic approach to ageing based on the 62 recommendations of the International Plan of Action on Ageing and the 18 United Nations Principles for Older Persons.

Ageing in all human societies is both a success story and a challenge for humankind. I say a success story because of the tremendous scientific advances that have enabled us to overcome some diseases and to effectively treat or prevent others that can cause premature death, to be treated or prevented effectively. Life expectancy has increased, including in the developing countries. In short, the living standards of peoples have improved.

But it is also a new and major challenge for public health and social integration. When the United Nations launched on 1 October 1998 in New York the International Year of Older Persons, with the theme "Towards a society for all ages", it sought specifically to focus the attention of the international community on the daunting challenge of ageing during the third millennium.

My country, Senegal, welcomes this positive initiative and the important work done by the United Nations system, the non-governmental organizations and other actors of civil society throughout this year. I should like to mention in particular the activities of the Economic and Social Council and its Consultative Group for the International Year, as well as the useful work done by the Coalition 99 group to disseminate the objectives of the year and to raise awareness of the challenges to be met to build an open, integrated, unified society.

In Senegal, people over 55 represent 7.6 per cent of the population. That percentage will rise to 21 per cent in 2010.

Because of our longstanding African traditions, which confer a special role and status on older persons,

and taking due account of the contribution of the elderly to the balance of society, and in particular to the education of young people, my country has always given high priority to the question of older persons. In 1987, a national committee on ageing was created, and a national day for older persons was proclaimed.

The initiatives and activities undertaken by Senegal since the launching of the International Year have made a great contribution to resolving the concerns of the elderly throughout our national territory. The Councils of Wise Persons that were set up on that occasion continue to be venues conducive to reflection, initiative and dialogue among older persons and, through their suggestions and proposals, help to guide the activities of local and State bodies in the area of social policies.

This political will is also reflected in a national plan of action drafted together with organizations for older persons, which each year are given an audience with the President of the Republic.

Senegal's plan of action seeks to promote what we call "productive old age". It also seeks to protect and assist older people by making it easier to finance projects for them, improving their access to credit and establishing specialized health centres. My Government is thus seeking to create an enabling environment for integrating older people into the social fabric. It is also doing its best to eliminate gender disparities and inter-generational conflict.

Although in Africa we may not have the same constraints as the developed countries with regard to the challenges of ageing, studies show that the rate of increase of the older population in developing countries is now more than double that in developed countries. In our countries extreme poverty is now very often creating situations that are harmful to the health of older people.

It is therefore important to step up our efforts within the United Nations to combat the exclusion and marginalization of older people so as to promote their integration into our assistance and social protection systems, including where there are humanitarian crises and conflicts. Because the elderly represent a precious asset for society, and not a separate group, we must promote respect for their inalienable human rights if, together, we want to build a society for all ages.

Mr. Fonseca (Brazil): Of all the major transformations in the structure of Brazilian society over recent decades, none has been more far-reaching than the revolution in its demographic dynamic. Due to a sharp decrease in birth rates and to a substantial increase in life expectancy, the Brazilian population is ageing. Whereas in 1960 those over 60 years of age accounted for roughly 3 per cent of the total population, this age bracket now represents 9 per cent, or more than 13 million Brazilians.

The longevity of individuals is clearly the direct and highly desirable outcome of improvements in social and health-care services. By contrast, its corollary, the ageing of the population as a whole, generates increased demands for facilities, benefits and assistance. This trend presents a pressing challenge for Governments and society, one which will only intensify over the coming years. Ageing is just as much a cause as a consequence of profound social, economic and cultural changes under way in society. Therefore, dealing with its implications requires an integrated approach and concerted efforts, both at the national and international levels, if we are to effectively move "towards a society for all ages".

Although the intensity of this phenomenon varies from country to country, and even within regions of the same country, ageing has been a concern to the United Nations since the 1950s. The first response by the United Nations was the convening, in 1982, of a World Assembly devoted to the issue and the adoption of the International Plan of Action on Ageing, which was endorsed by the General Assembly. In 1991 the General Assembly adopted the United Nations Principles for Older Persons, and in 1992 it decided to proclaim 1999 the International Year of Older Persons.

The Brazilian National Policy for Older Persons, enacted in 1994, enshrines the goals and guiding principles adopted by the General Assembly in 1991. It seeks to preserve and enhance the social rights of the elderly by fostering their self-reliant, integrated and meaningful interaction in society. The guiding principles of this policy are: non-discrimination of any kind; understanding that the ageing process concerns society as a whole; respect for economic, social and regional variation as well as differences between urban and rural areas that affect older persons; and, finally, recognition of the joint responsibility of State, families and civil society in ensuring older persons' rights and participation in community life and protecting their dignity and well-being.

In order to achieve these goals, the national policy sets priorities for governmental actions in health care, education, housing and urbanization, cultural life, sports

and leisure activities and human rights as they relate to the elderly. Almost by definition, health-care needs and costs are greatest for the elderly. Therefore, the Brazilian Government attaches especially high priority to preventive quality health-care services for the aged. Family members and community centres, rather than nursing homes and other institutions, are encouraged to take the lead in caring for them. Out of respect and regard for those who have a lifetime of service to society, Government policy seeks to foster a sense of social responsibility to the older generations and commends active volunteer work in this field.

One fundamental outcome of the ageing process, especially in developing countries like Brazil, is the increase, both in relative and in absolute terms, in the number of economically dependent individuals and groups and the drain on public resources. So as to secure the rights of pensioners, today and tomorrow, a far-reaching Government-proposed constitutional amendment has been enacted. As a result, the welfare regime is being replaced by a more sustainable, socially just, democratic and accountable system.

Yet a revitalized welfare system alone will not address all the needs and expectations of our elders. The labour market cannot remain immune to this demographic revolution. The Brazilian Government has risen to the challenge of generating new opportunities for those aged 60 and over. The Ministry of Labour, together with the Ministry of Social Security, is providing professional training for the elderly in order to better prepare them for the demands of an increasingly competitive and knowledge-based job market.

An important clearing house for these multiple tasks is the Brazilian Committee for the International Year of Older Persons. It has prepared a programme covering the main aspects relating to the ageing process, including workshops and seminars held throughout the country. Great emphasis has been given to the debate on how to implement the National Policy for Older Persons, with a view to making recommendations to the federal Government, targeting the specific needs of the five different regions of the country. On the other hand, state and local governments have joined hands with volunteer organizations in promoting practical and cost-effective measures. These include an influenza vaccination campaign for the elderly population, social integration activities through sports and leisure and education campaigns for social workers to teach them about gerontology.

Brazil is truly committed to becoming a society for all ages. Yet if we are to guarantee the effective social integration of the elderly, we must first address the underlying challenge of ensuring that all have a productive and fulfilling life. That challenge is the eradication of poverty. Never is poverty more dramatic and despairing than when it affects the most vulnerable groups. It shatters the hope of youth and denies dignity to those in the autumn of their life.

To ensure a better quality of life to those advanced in age is a responsibility we all share towards the old as well as the new generations.

Mr. Suh (Republic of Korea): As we stand at the threshold of a new millennium, we face numerous new issues fraught with challenges yet ripe with opportunities. One such issue concerns the older members of our society.

While the pace of the current demographic trend towards an older population differs from nation to nation, the sheer magnitude of the numbers bespeaks a sweeping greying of global society. Given the immensity of this demographic shift, we must cultivate the hidden resource represented by older persons. For without their active involvement no society will be able to achieve sustainable development.

The observance in 1999 of the International Year of Older Persons, under the theme of "Towards a society for all ages", was thus particularly timely. Within that relatively short span of time, many important objectives were achieved. Among the successes was the establishment of a policy framework for achieving an age-integrated society; this framework, which has been refined through in-depth debate at various conferences and meetings at all levels, should prove of great benefit to policy-makers. In addition, media campaigns and other events commemorating the Year promoted public awareness not only of the needs of the elderly but also of their untapped potential.

The International Year of Older Persons thereby contributed to a radical rethinking of our concept of the elderly, who are traditionally relegated to the role of passive victims and a societal burden. The new perception is that older persons constitute an invaluable part of our human resources, and, indeed, that they are indispensable to the process of social development.

Recognizing that none of these achievements would have been possible without the dedicated efforts of the Consultative Group for the International Year of Older Persons, the Secretariat and the many non-governmental organizations involved in this issue, my delegation would like to express its thanks to them.

I now turn to my own Government's policies concerning older persons, and to the efforts undertaken by the Republic of Korea in support of the Year. The Republic of Korea has long striven to improve the lot of its elderly. In June 1981 it enacted the Welfare Act for Older Persons, which set forth three guiding principles adhering to the United Nations Principles for Older Persons: first, to ensure sound, stable, healthy lives for the elderly as people of dignity; secondly, to provide the elderly with employment opportunities and a chance to participate in social activities; and thirdly, to harness the unique knowledge and expertise of older persons in the service of social development. Since enacting the Welfare Act, the Government of the Republic of Korea has steadily refined its policies for the elderly. As a result, over the past two decades, most of Korea's elderly have enjoyed a range of benefits including medical insurance and old age pensions. But these policies often targeted only the most vulnerable segments of the elderly population, such as the destitute or the disabled.

Rapid demographic changes, together with the supplanting of the traditional, extended family by the nuclear family, demanded a new approach. The nation needed an enhanced, comprehensive and long-term strategy that would encompass all older persons. Responding to that need, earlier this year the Korean Government formulated an action plan on mid- to long-term development directions for the health and welfare of the elderly in preparation for an ageing society in the twenty-first century. The new plan places emphasis on building up the productive capacities of older persons and nurturing their social interaction on the individual, family and community levels. To help ensure that the lives of the elderly are sound and stable, the national pension scheme was expanded in 1999 to cover virtually all citizens. The intent is to make that programme a cornerstone of income security for older persons. Regarding the health of Korea's elderly, the health care system is being revamped to accommodate the special needs of senior citizens.

Job opportunities for the elderly are also increasing. More and more job placement centres are focusing on older workers, and special vocational training is also being made available. In the legislative arena too, the Government is striving to create a favourable environment for expanding employment opportunities for the elderly.

The Korean Government has also made it a priority to develop measures that will enable older persons to continue their social activities in the pursuit of self-fulfilment. To that end, the Government will broaden its financial assistance to senior-citizen centres, and plans are afoot to open a significant number of new facilities.

My Government is also striving to strengthen the ties of the elderly to their communities. Old age can, unfortunately, be a lonely time; by playing active community roles, older people gain a new, larger sense of family and enrich the entire social fabric. The Korean Government is working to encourage such community bonds by promoting local volunteer associations and developing life-long education programmes.

In addition to those concrete policy initiatives, the Korean Organizing Committee for the International Year of Older Persons and the relevant government authorities have organized numerous events this year on the theme "Towards a society for all ages". Since February, nationwide radio has broadcast weekly debates on this theme, and public awareness campaigns have been conducted via publications, advertisements and the Internet. Similarly, the national fair on the ageing industry, held in May, drew public interest and stimulated private-sector investment in that industry. Events designed to strengthen multi-generational relationships, a tradition that has deep roots in our culture but that has faded in recent years, were also successful.

Of particular significance among the initiatives was the Consult the Elders gathering held at the presidential office in January. Representatives from organizations for the elderly met with President Kim Dae-jung to discuss a variety of ageing-related issues and to submit policy recommendations. Such gatherings are expected to be held at regular intervals, giving older persons a direct hand in policy formulation and implementation.

As highlighted in the report of the Secretary-General on preparations for the Year (A/53/294), the best preparation for the greying of our society is to invest in all phases of life and to foster an environment supportive of the elderly. The Korean Government will step up its efforts to promote investments in life-long human development and to support age-integrated institutions.

To achieve those objectives, it is essential that we share our experiences and ideas. In that vein, my delegation applauds the efforts by the Secretariat, with the support of the Government of the Netherlands, to develop an Internet-accessible database of public policies and programmes on ageing. I am also pleased to note the success of the Interregional Expert Consultation on Developing a Framework for Policies for A Society for All Ages and of the Sixth Asia/Oceania Regional Congress of Gerontology, held in Seoul this past June.

My delegation looks forward to the Secretariat's report on the global impact of the International Year of Older Persons and to the discussions being held in these plenary meetings. The report will provide us with a meaningful framework for enhancing our long-term policies for the elderly.

Regarding resolution 37/2 of the Commission for Social Development, my delegation strongly supports the conducting of a review in 2002 of the outcome of the World Assembly on Ageing, focusing on topics such as the interrelationship between ageing and development.

Even when the International Year of Older Persons has officially concluded, let us not lay this issue to rest. Rather, let us build on the progress made during the Year, using that as a starting point for the concrete work to be done. It is our strong belief that the new millennium will be an era of prosperity if we succeed in mounting a common effort to construct a society for all ages. The Government of the Republic of Korea will continue to do its part to accomplish this objective and remains open to the innovative ideas of others as we all prepare for the challenges to come.

Mr. Rosin (Israel): The declaration by the United Nations of 1999 as the International Year of Older Persons was welcomed in Israel and was implemented through the appointment by the Minister of Labour and Social Welfare of a public committee to celebrate the year in the spirit of "a society for all ages". Respect for the aged has been a time-honoured concept in Jewish tradition, as expressed in the Torah, our Holy Scripture, which was handed down at Mount Sinai thousands of years ago.

In the book of Leviticus it is written,

> "Stand up in the presence of the aged, and honour the face of the old man, and you shall fear your God: I am the Lord" (*The Holy Bible, Leviticus 19:32*).

This commandment has been translated into the practical religious laws of Israel, both during exile and now in the laws and society of the State of Israel.

The proportion of older persons in Israel has grown from just over 3 per cent at the time of the declaration of the State in 1948 to almost 10 per cent of the population of 6 million in 1998. In Tel Aviv, the largest city, the elderly number 17 per cent of the population. The fastest-growing segment among elderly people in Israel is those over 75, of which the capital, Jerusalem, contains the greatest number. Massive immigration has contributed to the almost tenfold increase in the total population since 1948, many of the immigrants are old, but much progress has been made in service arrangements and legislation on behalf of older persons. A special example is the unique Nursing Insurance Law of 1988 for the disabled elderly, which provides for extra personal help at home, for dressing, washing, et cetera. In the first year of the Law's existence, 21,359 people received its benefits, compared to the 5,000 who received equivalent services in 1987. In 1998 the number had risen to 82,519. In 1995 the average proportion of elderly people in Jewish towns who received services was 12.6 per cent; in the Arab sector it was 15.3 per cent — the highest rate in the country was 25 per cent, in Kafr Kanna, which is a large Arab town.

A more detailed report about the activities of the International Year of Older Persons will be circulated here tomorrow. That report describes specific themes relating to the International Year, how they have become policy and have been implemented during the Year. The areas of activity include fostering relations between the young and the elderly, with particular emphasis on educational programmes; enhancing the image of the older person; communication among the elderly; and issues regarding the health of the elderly. Other professional activities relate to charters of the rights of the older person, the United Nations Charter, the charter of women's rights, the charter of the rights of the elderly sick person, legislative recommendations and academic meetings and conferences. For productive life in old age, voluntarism has been emphasized as a fulfilling activity. Creativity among the elderly has been fostered through writing and photographic competitions, which will lead to the exhibition and publication of their writings respectively. Many public events and media presentations have taken place with the participation of the older population throughout the country.

The appointed committee consists of about 50 representatives from various branches of society — academic, service, organizational, ministerial and political — that are dealing with the healthy and disabled elderly. As of now, it has met four times, once with the participation of the Minister of Social Welfare. From this committee were formed subcommittees dealing with welfare and society, the elderly and their environment, health, and economic and legislative issues. These subcommittees have met several times during the year. In addition, various key persons, mainly from the social services sector in 10 geographical areas throughout the country, were appointed to form local working groups, which are responsible for implementing the decisions of the committees and for carrying out local activities on their own initiative.

Much emphasis has been placed on inter-generational activity. Pupils in secondary schools undertake to assist older people in the community and in residential homes as part of a personal obligation, and this takes different forms in accordance with local initiative and custom. For example, in the mixed Jewish-Arab population of Nazareth, the Arab Chairman of the local team for the International Year of Older Persons reported that there were four meetings involving grandfathers and schoolchildren, which covered some of the early history of the settlement of the town. Interestingly, a social worker there composed a song in Arabic about the International Year of Older Persons, which was distributed to pupils.

Eshel, the Association for the Development of Services for the Aged in Israel, organized a photographic competition for schoolchildren, focusing on the way of life of old people from Jewish, Arab, Druze and other populations in Israel. The photographs included a Jew at prayer, an old disabled man being fed by his grandchildren, Arab women in traditional dress and others, and these were exhibited in the Jerusalem Theatre and in an illustrated calendar celebrating the Jewish New Year in September. In many schools, the pupils visit pensioners in their homes or accompany them for security reasons when they go to collect their pension. Joint workshops and seminars, voluntary projects carried out together and combined choirs of young and old are other examples of this collaboration.

Topics of special one-day academic symposia held throughout the year have included "The aged in Jewish tradition", "Ageing in the era of understanding", "Intergenerational relationships", "Ageing towards the twenty-first century", "Typology of the aged population in Israel" and, tomorrow, a symposium at Ben-Gurion University in Beer Sheva on "Futurism in Ageing". A number of conferences for older people have been held throughout the country, including workshops in which they were asked to express their questions, doubts and opinions about ageing in our country.

Creativity in old age has to be seen to be believed: a competition for people over the age of 70 to write about their views on ageing has attracted more than 100 entries, including quite a few poems. The intention is to publish many of them as a book, which will serve as a literary and academic source for the study of ageing. Similarly, the work submitted for a photographic competition between elderly photographers will be exhibited this month in Jerusalem.

The question of insurance for long-term nursing-home care has been discussed in the subcommittees. It, together with a number of legislative issues, such as medications for the elderly and recompense for care-givers, will be brought by our Committee to the Knesset — parliamentary — Committee on Social Welfare in two weeks' time.

Discussions of health are only one aspect. Last week witnessed a march in Jerusalem of 6,000 pensioners, as part of a national health programme of walking for the elderly. This group activity will be continued under expert volunteer guidance in coming years. Voluntarism as a regular occupation of the older person has also received much attention, and the organization of volunteer societies has been upgraded during the course of the Year.

In conclusion, perhaps the most result of the International Year of Older Persons — after the memories have faded of the entertainments, conferences, radio and television presentations and other publicity — should be a continuation of the momentum to enhance the positive image of the old person. The healthy should be encouraged to be more active, and the needs of the disabled and their caregivers demand ever-increasing attention. We hope that the International Year of Older Persons 1999 will project its positive lessons about the older population well into the next century. As we enter a new millennium, it is timely to remember the forecast of the prophet Zechariah:

> "Thus saith the Lord of hosts: Old men and old women will yet sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each one with his staff in his hand . . .

"And the streets of the city will be full of boys and girls playing in its streets." *(The Holy Bible, Zechariah 8:4, 5)*

Ms. Göransson (Sweden): The United Nations International Year of Older Persons has led to increasing international awareness of the needs and capacities of older people. From statements we have heard today it is obvious that the Year has stimulated activities throughout the world.

Sweden has the highest proportion in the world of people aged over 65 and over 80. In Sweden 17.4 per cent of the population are over 65, and almost 5 per cent are over 80. Sweden already has some experience of the developments many other countries are now facing. And yet the proportion of elderly people in Sweden will continue to rise; in 20 years one in four Swedes will be over the age of 65. The growing number of senior citizens will require new approaches to the task of organizing a society for the well-being of all. Not only is the proportion of elderly and old people increasing, but these people will also differ in certain respects from today's old-age pensioners. For example, most of them will be healthier and better educated. Already one in four people reaching pensionable age has a mother or father who is still alive.

The increasing number of elderly people in our community should be seen as an achievement and a challenge. It is an achievement because more people have had a better chance of living longer lives of high quality. It is a challenge because we know that in general elderly people are in greater need of health and medical care and of social welfare services.

During the 1990s Sweden suffered a profound economic crisis, perceived by many as a threat to their common welfare. Now that the economy is recovering its balance, measures are being taken to restore the quality and the content of our social welfare services.

The elderly and their welfare are priority issues for the Swedish Government. Just over a year ago the Government presented a national action plan regarding policies for the elderly. The plan includes national policy goals and measures to improve elderly care in the years to come. And may I point out that one particular problem confronting elderly care services in Sweden is the difficulty we have — and will increasingly have — in recruiting staff in sufficient numbers. The number of people of working age will decline in the twenty-first century. Caring for the elderly is a low-status occupation in Sweden, and people who work in the elderly care sector are mainly women. This is something we are actively seeking to change.

In Sweden national, regional and local activities organized in connection with the International Year have prompted wide-ranging discussions on policies for the elderly. Let me mention a few issues.

First, an important element in the ongoing development of Swedish society is its transformation into an information society. The older section of the population is at risk of being excluded from those areas of development that presuppose an interest and a degree of proficiency in the use of computers. Information technology can be used to enhance and disseminate knowledge and promote a just society. And, because it can facilitate dialogue between voters and their political representatives, it is also an ideal tool for strengthening democracy.

To prevent the growth of new divisions in society, we must guarantee that knowledge about information technology and the skills to use it are made available to all. To this end, we must ensure that nothing prevents development from reaching everyone in the community, regardless of age, disability or location. In one recent event, which took place concurrently in virtually every library in Sweden, elderly people were invited to try their hand at surfing the Internet. The initiative met with the greatest interest, and thousands of elderly women and men came to the libraries. The purpose was to help more older people overcome the initial resistance most of us feel when confronted with new technologies.

Another issue is the meeting of generations. An important factor in the creation of a society for people of all ages is our ability to counter antagonisms between the generations and create meeting places where knowledge and experience can be fruitfully exchanged. We live in a youth-fixated society where opportunities for public discussion between young people and the elderly are at best infrequent. When today's teenagers in Sweden reach the age of 40, they will be living in a society in which every fourth citizen is over 65. Now is the time for them to start thinking about the kind of society they want, and about how they themselves will be regarded by the young when they get older. A national essay competition for school pupils and an inter-generational conference are two examples of activities carried out during the International Year.

Over the years we have learned that one of the most important conditions for high-quality elderly care is cooperation between the health care and social services. We want to live a long life and we want to remain healthy. Many people look forward to retirement in the hope of enjoying an active, fulfilling life that lasts many years. The last few years have seen a growing interest in measures aimed at preventing ill health among the elderly in Sweden.

Mr. Nejad Hosseinian (Islamic Republic of Iran), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The Government is now supporting several long-term pilot projects involving outreach activities among the elderly. A condition of this support is that these activities include staff from both the health care and social services.

Many of the proposed measures set out in the national action plan relate to the development of user participation in and influence on the support and assistance provided by the care services for the elderly. The reception accorded to the elderly and the degree to which they and members of their families can take part in the care they receive is one of the most important aspects of quality development in this area. During the International Year, we will seek to highlight examples of activities in which user participation plays a prominent part.

Let me, finally, turn to the importance of changing attitudes. Creating a society for people of all ages — where our senior citizens can take part and have a say in the decisions affecting the community at large and where young people will want to work in health care and services for the elderly — calls for a radical change in attitude towards the elderly and the ageing. One challenge is to change attitudes and bring people to regard the elderly as a resource. We also need to change the elderly's picture of themselves as being retired from community life. A fundamental concern in shaping policies for the elderly is therefore to transform attitudes and to enhance respect for older people. In this regard we have a lot to learn from other cultures.

I have sketched the broad outlines of Sweden's policies for the elderly and the reforms we are undertaking. I believe they demonstrate the Swedish Government's commitment to pursuing politics that are in line with the objectives of the International Year. But of course we realize that conditions and opportunities vary from country to country. In designing and implementing strategies and programmes for international cooperation, we must seek to build our policies upon the common understanding that all people are fundamentally equal and entitled to the same rights.

Mr. Alemán (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): Today we have gathered to celebrate the International Year of Older Persons, paying well-deserved tribute to those who have reached a stage in their lives in which the family and the State have important parts to play in the creation of a society based on more equitable and human parametres for their benefit.

Time is an old cosmic magician who measures man and mankind with different yardsticks: a very short one for the human being, an almost endless one for mankind. But even if man's sojourn on Earth is brief, science and experience accumulated by mankind over the years have allowed humanity, particularly in this century, to make significant conquests. Life expectancy has grown by 20 years since 1950. Today, one out of 10 inhabitants of the planet is over 60; it is expected that, by the year 2050, one in five will be of that age, most of whom will live in the developing world. It is also a fact that women have a greater life expectancy than men and their situation deserves special consideration. We must therefore join forces in attempting to resolve the ancient problems that continue to confront mankind: poverty, inequality and the lack of development and social justice.

Poverty is a mandatory topic if we wish seriously to address the problems of one of the most vulnerable groups of society: the elderly. In this respect, Ecuador is no stranger to the slow-down in world economic growth; in fact, we may now be experiencing our most severe crisis in this century, exacerbated by an enormous burden of external debt. Together with poverty, inequity directly affects the most vulnerable. The unequal distribution of wealth is accompanied by a social security system that benefits only a narrow sector of society and does not provide universal access to pension and health systems to those over 65.

We must point out, however, that the Government of Ecuador has not been paralysed by adversity. In 1980, the Ministry of Social Welfare created a bureau dedicated to the interests of older citizens. In 1991, the National Department of Gerontology was established as the organ in charge of planning, assessing, developing and monitoring programmes for that sector of the population. Today, it coordinates the plans, programmes, projects and activities linked to the celebration of the International Year. Similarly, the National Council for Women pays particular attention to the problems of older women.

I wish briefly to introduce some of our national initiatives to create a society for all ages.

The Law for Senior Citizens has just been adopted to replace the Special Law for Older Persons. The new Law is essentially dedicated to providing access to a standard of living that ensures medical care, food, clothing and housing for all Ecuadorian citizens over 60. In this respect, the National Department of Gerontology is developing a campaign to disseminate information and increase awareness about legislation for the elderly and the International Year of Older Persons.

The National Human Rights Plan has a specific chapter on senior citizens.

The Ministry of Social Welfare has developed a programme to train grass-roots staff working in national gerontology centres in order to improve care for the elderly. General regulations have been drafted to standardize the functioning of the gerontology centres.

In April 1999, the Ecuadorian chapter of the Ibero-American Intergovernmental Network for Comprehensive Policies for Senior Citizens was established, uniting representatives of public and private organizations, senior citizens' organizations and gerontology centres throughout the country.

The Project for Technical Cooperation between the Ministry of Social Welfare and the World Food Programme was officially introduced. It is designed to fund and provide food for centres, community dining rooms, training workshops and recreational centres for the elderly.

One of the most moving activities initiated by the National Department of Gerontology was coordinating the National Network for the Global Embrace of the Aged, initiated on 2 October.

The Government of Ecuador welcomes initiatives to establish a long-term strategy for facing the challenges of an ageing population. We therefore consider that it would be suitable to review and reassess the 1982 International Plan of Action on Ageing. We also support the idea of convening a second world assembly on ageing in 2002 to discuss the issue of older persons. We are grateful to the Government of Spain for having offered to host that important meeting.

Before concluding, allow me to place on record the recognition of the Government of Ecuador of the untiring efforts of the coordinators of the Consultative Group for the International Year of Ambassador Julia Tavares de Alvarez of the Dominican Republic and of Mr. Aurelio Fernández of Spain. We also thank the Division for Social Policy and Development Policy and its Director, Mr. John Langmore, the Coordinator of the Year, Mr. Alexandre Sidorenko, the staff of the unit and programme on ageing and all those who contributed, directly or indirectly, to giving this Year special significance.

At the same time, I would like to commend the decisive input and close cooperation of the non-governmental organizations, both Ecuadorian and international, who inspired us in our work, remained open to dialogue and were always ready to undertake joint projects.

May the International Year of Older Persons lead us to reflect seriously on the pressing need to face the challenge of jointly creating a society for all ages.

The Acting President: I call on the representative of the Sudan.

Mr. Khalil (Sudan) (*spoke in Arabic*): Today we meet to observe a highly cherished and significant occasion: the International Year of Older Persons, in appreciation of and gratitude for the lofty status of this important societal category. The Year also recognizes its effective role in raising families and generations. In 1982, the World Assembly on Ageing adopted the International Plan of Action on Ageing. The General Assembly designated the year 1999 as the International Year of Older Persons under the theme "Towards a society for all ages". It was decided by resolution 52/80 that Members would meet to review the States' follow-up activity to the Year.

I would like to add my country's voice to the statement made by Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

Care for the elderly in the Sudan is primarily a concerted social responsibility. As a social institution and the nucleus of society, the family is responsible for providing care to its citizens, especially the elderly. The Sudanese society pays special care and attention to the elderly, extending respect, love and appreciation. Any departure from this rule is a deviation from the social order. The elderly's long life experience qualifies them to offer advice on matters of family and society.

Similarly, all religions hold older persons in high esteem and place them on a pedestal. God Almighty has decreed:

> Thy Lord hath decreed
> That ye worship none but Him,
> And that ye be kind
> To parents. Whether one
> Or both of them attain
> Old age in thy life,
> Say not to them a word
> Of contempt, nor repel them
> But address them,
> In terms of honour.
>
> *[The Holy Koran, XVII:23]*

Elderly women in the Sudan have a distinct and important role in society. They convey wisdom and traditions to the succeeding generations and contribute to the upbringing of generations. They are known for their great contribution to national struggle, particularly in the battles for independence and advocacy of women's rights.

The Sudan launched its celebrations of this noble occasion on 1 October 1998, which coincided with the United Nations celebrations and those of the rest of the world. My country has abided by resolution 229 adopted by the Arab Ministers for Social Planning regarding the celebration of the International Year of Older Persons from October 1998 to October 1999. Given the attention granted by my Government to his matter, the Ministry for Social Planning adopted, in April 1998, a ministerial resolution setting up a national committee composed of all authorities working in the area of the elderly. The celebration included many activities reflecting the interest of the State and society in the elderly. A popular celebration was held under the aegis of the Vice-President, at which mass institutions, the elderly, non-governmental organizations, the World Organization on Care for the Elderly and the United Nations representative to the Sudan took part. The grandmothers and the grandfathers of the Sudan were honoured.

It has been decided that observance of this occasion will take place throughout schools and various places of worship, by devoting the first classes in school to identifying the issues relating to the elderly and how to provide care for them. Similar activities were carried out in mosques and churches. Celebrations were held throughout our provinces. Furthermore, a postage stamp was issued in celebration of this occasion. A workshop on the health of the elderly was held with a view to setting up a national plan to provide health programmes for them. Among the most outstanding achievements of the celebrations of this Year for the elderly has been the elaboration of a draft law on care for the elderly in 1999. The final text will be formulated and adopted by the end of this year.

The Sudan also participated in many external meetings in celebrating this Year. We took part in the symposium on the elderly held in Tunisia in October 1998, presenting a working paper on the elderly in the Sudan.

The elderly, as is known, are the most vulnerable group. More than any other group, they need the attention and care of their families, society and Governments. Yet we see wars raging in many parts of the world, particularly in Africa, that directly affect the provision of basic needs to the elderly, such as health care, nutrition and security. There is a need to raise awareness of the status and position of the elderly during wars and conflicts. National and international potential should be harnessed to provide for their needs and to create an atmosphere of stability and tranquillity for them.

The gap between the developing and developed countries is widening daily as a result of the disparity between development rates and gross national product, the spread of disease, especially AIDS, the lack of resources and insufficient official development assistance. This constitutes a challenge that should be faced and addressed in the light of the facts before us.

Population growth alone does not, in our view, constitute a problem for developing countries as much as it poses a question about creating a climate favourable to these people to fully satisfy their needs in their old age. Therefore, we see a need for creating a just social and economic international order that does not differentiate between rich and poor countries.

In conclusion, we wish to emphasize our commitment to the issues of older persons and their rights, through the elaboration of comprehensive strategies and programmes in this field, at all levels. I wish to extend my thanks to Ambassador Alvarez of the Dominican Republic for her continuous and valuable efforts in this celebration of the International Year of Older Persons. We wish success to all in these deliberations.

Ms. Belinda Manahan (Philippines): I join other delegations who have earlier congratulated Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab on his election as President of this Assembly, which remains an important forum for the expression of individual countries' views and priorities. I express our confidence

in his able stewardship in leading this Assembly to a successful conclusion.

My delegation would like to express our appreciation to the Secretary-General for his report on the activities relating to this year's celebration of the International Year of Older Persons. The report is clearly an effort to describe in summary form the various initiatives around the world in response to the issue of ageing populations. Our year-long celebration dedicated to older persons is a fitting tribute to and a recognition of the many contributions older persons have made to the growth and development of our societies. My delegation is pleased to note the many innovative actions by and approaches of various countries.

Today the Philippines launches its plan of action for older persons, marking the culmination of the country's year-long celebration of the International Year of Older Persons. The nationwide observance of the International Year is our response to General Assembly resolution 47/5 declaring 1999 the International Year of Older Persons. The celebration has involved not just Government but also non-governmental organizations and the many and vibrant associations of older persons in the country. To celebrate the International Year, we have conducted seminars on ageing and older persons. We have given national awards to older persons in the areas of resource generation, community service and leadership and elderly friendly establishments. We have held photo exhibits, poster design contests and trade fairs. Last Saturday, the Philippines joined the Global Walk event dedicated to older persons. Quite fittingly, the event was dubbed "The Family Walk for Grandparents".

The tradition of providing family care to older persons is enshrined in our Constitution, which states that it is the duty of the family to take care of its older persons while the State may design a social security programme for them. This policy and tradition lives on, as can be seen in the fact that only 5 per cent of the older population live alone, while the majority reside with their immediate family. Recognizing the central role that the family plays in the care and nurture of older persons, the Philippine plan of action aims to develop a holistic and multi-generational care programme for older persons within the Filipino family network.

The formulation of the Philippine plan was guided by the Macau Declaration and Plan of Action on Ageing for Asia and the Pacific adopted by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific in a resolution sponsored by the Philippines at the Commission's fifty-fifth session, in April 1999. Following the lead of the Macau Plan of Action on Ageing, the Philippine plan of action likewise addresses seven areas of ageing-related concern.

The needs and problems of the sector are many, ranging from family finances to a perceived decline in respect for the elderly; the remarkable increase in the incidence of degenerative diseases among older persons; an environment that has been planned largely for young people; the lack of basic social services in the community where most older persons are; the high illiteracy rate; and the unscrupulous market practices to which older persons are becoming increasingly at risk.

Attention to the plight of older Filipinos did not begin with the country's observance of the International Year of Older Persons. Before 1999, two significant laws had already been enacted. Republic Act 7432 seeks to maximize the contribution of senior citizens to nation-building and grants them benefits and privileges. The Act created an office of senior citizens' affairs in every city and municipality, primarily to monitor the implementation of the legislation and programmes within their jurisdictions and the release of nationally uniform identification cards which provide 20 per cent discounts at recreational centres and restaurants, and on medicines and transportation. To date, a total of 1,495 municipal and 82 city offices of senior citizens' affairs have been established.

Republic Act 7876 establishes a senior citizens' centre in every city and municipality in the Philippines. To date, there are 201 senior citizens' centres nationwide which are being managed by local senior citizens themselves. There are 3.7 million older persons, or 77 per cent of the total elderly population, who are members of the Federation of Senior Citizens' Associations of the Philippines, the biggest umbrella organization of older persons.

Currently, there is a Bill pending in Congress — The Magna Carta for Older Persons — that seeks to establish a comprehensive, long-term, national programme that would give older persons continued opportunities for employment, livelihood projects and access to formal and non-formal education and social services, specifically in the area of health and housing.

In order to uplift their living conditions, our Government provides various programmes and services for older persons, including skills training and the provision of capital assistance for income-generating activities; organization of community-based associations for older persons that provide them with opportunities for socialization, self-expression and self-enhancement;

mobilization of older persons for peer outreach, child protection services, family life enrichment and similar projects; assistance for the physical rehabilitation of older persons; substitute family care for abandoned, neglected, unattached and homeless older persons; and, last but not least, after-care and follow-up services for those discharged from residential care facilities.

The State attaches priority to keeping the Filipino family whole and intact, it being the main source of care and emotional support to the older person and the basic unit responsible for preparing the younger generations for ageing. Yet the poverty that afflicts many Filipino families and communities hinders the provision of adequate care and support to older persons. We are responding to this reality by creating critical partnerships between and among local and national governments, civil society and other sectors in order to maximize resources and direct them to the neediest areas, sectors, communities and families.

The Philippines draws from its rich experiences in the observance of the International Year of Older Persons as we make the following recommendations. First, we urge the United Nations to further intensify its initiatives to strengthen the family to enable it to continue providing care to the elderly and preparing its members for productive ageing. Secondly, since lifelong preparation for ageing entails the provision of basic services for human development, including the expansion of coverage of social security schemes, especially in the informal sector, the United Nations needs to urge Member countries to adopt and implement the 20/20 compact, whereby 20 per cent of gross national product and 20 per cent of official development assistance are allotted to the provision of basic social services. Thirdly, we need to understand more fully the implications of globalization for ageing and older persons. Initially, we see among these the need for lifelong education and consumer protection to enable older persons to cope with the rapid changes and demands of increasingly interdependent economies and societies. These areas require cooperation among nations.

Finally, we reiterate our belief in the benefit of learning from each other's experiences. While countries experience demographic transition differently, and while the strategies of one country cannot be adopted by another indiscriminately, there is much to learn from each other in helping older persons live more meaningful and rewarding lives beyond 1999, the International Year of Older Persons, and into the next century.

Mr. Kiselev (Russian Federation) *(spoke in Russian)*: It is a great honour for me to participate in the plenary meetings of the General Assembly devoted to such a topical subject as the situation of older persons.

We agree with the assertion that respect and concern for older persons have always, and everywhere, been an abiding sign of human civilization. Despite their age people of the older generation are a constant source of the joy of life and social optimism. They guarantee moral and cultural values and are an example of a humanitarian attitude to life and self-sacrifice for their families and society as a whole.

The decision of the General Assembly to proclaim 1999 the International Year of Older Persons immediately found a positive response in the Russian Federation, where the proportion of people of pensionable age is 20 per cent. In the near future this proportion will grow. We view the observance of the International Year of Older Persons in Russia as an important stage in the State's activities in the interests of the older generation, one opening up new opportunities for improving the situation of older persons and enhancing their role in the social, economic and cultural life of the country.

For the successful observance of the International Year of Older Persons, the President of the Russian Federation and the Government adopted appropriate decisions, set up an organizational committee and approved the basic events of the Year. Similar measures were implemented in the constituent entities of the Russian Federation.

Events within the International Year of Older Persons in Russia are taking place against the backdrop of constant additional measures that are being taken by the Government to enhance legal guarantees, to reform the pension system, to improve health care and supplies of medicines, to develop the network of social services for senior citizens and to enhance services in the social, cultural and educational fields. A special federal programme for 1997-1999 entitled "The Senior generation" is being carried out for 1997-1999 with a clear social orientation. Its implementation has been extended by the Russian Government to the year 2000. Practical activities in the interests of older persons are based on the achievements of the Russia's gerontology, which has a history going back more than 40 years and which has made a considerable contribution to the elaboration of new methods to care for older people.

The observance of the International Year of Older Persons in the Russian region has entailed practical events designed to mitigate the negative effects of ageing and the resultant individual and group problems. These events, which

show how we care for older persons, also include ceremonial and festive rallies, information and propaganda events and cultural and international events. The strategy of holding events under the International Year of Older Persons in many regions has been developed on the basis of special sociological research.

Work relating to the International Year and a conceptual base have received understanding and support from Russian non-governmental organizations and the media. They are showing increased willingness to involve older persons in social-oriented activities and take into account the needs of older readers and radio and television audiences. More diversified information is being provided about various aspects of the situation of senior citizens.

Particular attention during the Year was paid to the dissemination and implementation of the United Nations Principles for Older Persons in order to add life to their years, not just years to their lives. In implementing the Principles, the Russian Federation is attempting to find optimal solutions to socio-economic, family, household, psychological and many other problems of the elderly and to create conditions for a healthy, safe and dignified old age.

Monitoring the situation of the older generation has revealed the presence of three common problems of the elderly citizens of Russia: worsening health, low income and loneliness. The specific situation of older Russians today is that the objective social risks associated with the onset of old age are made worse given the transitional state of our economy.

We in Russia have felt with particular acuteness how difficult it is to find an optimal model for the transition to market conditions. The Russian Government is doing everything it can to ease for the elderly the social costs of last year's economic and financial crisis as much as possible. Now that we have managed to implement priority measures to resolve this crisis situation — curbing inflation, ensuring relative stability of our currency, preventing a catastrophic slump in production — the job of improving living standards and quality of life, including for people of pensionable age, has once again come to the fore.

Pursuant to the tasks assigned by the President of the Russian Federation and the Government, urgent measures are being taken to raise pensions and to carry out pension reform. We are planning to develop in the near future a concept for a State social policy for older persons for the period up to 2005, which will implement the ideas of a society for people of all ages.

Today the provisions of agreed United Nations documents that directly call on the United Nations system organizations and international financial institutions to provide support to economies in transition and to implement policies to improve the system of social welfare, including for elderly citizens, are as relevant as ever before. In our view, United Nations funds and programmes should pay more attention to the situation of older people when working out technical assistance projects for countries in transition. Specific areas of cooperation in this field could be the training of specialists in social and socio-cultural services for older people, working out recommendations to improve the pension system and an exchange of scientific information on the achievements of fundamental and applied gerontology. We hope that all these questions will be considered, and taken into account during the review of the International Plan of Action on Ageing.

The observance of the International Year of Older Persons under the auspices of the United Nations will definitely give a new impetus to our efforts to guarantee a happy old age and longevity for those to whom we owe our lives, education and basis for social development. The continuity of generations should never be interrupted. Older men and women are the keepers of invaluable life experience. Our care, assistance and responsibility for the destiny of our older fellow citizens will inspire them with courage and patience and give them strength for further life. By showing true love reinforced with care and understanding to older persons we, through our common efforts, are establishing the basis of a future society and giving it timeless humane values, which will help us respond in a fitting manner to the challenges of the twenty-first century.

Mr. Powles (New Zealand): New Zealand welcomed the designation of 1999 by the United Nations as the International Year of older Persons. older people around the world contribute to the diversity and richness of our societies and communities. The International Year has been a time to celebrate and value that contribution. It has also been an opportunity to improve understanding between generations, as well as our understanding of the impact of growing ageing populations on societies around the world.

In New Zealand, the International Year has provided an important opportunity to build on the standards set by the International Plan of Action on Ageing. The fundamental principles of the year - independence, participation, care, self-fulfilment and dignity - flow from the respect any society should hold for its older people. New Zealand has

worked to incorporate these principles into our International Year activities.

New Zealand's theme for the International Year has been "Valuing Older People". Our objectives, which flowed from this theme, were two-fold: to promote positive attitudes to ageing and older people and to prepare for an ageing population. The Year has provided a focus for older people to demonstrate the many ways in which they participate and contribute to the community. Media interest in activities undertaken during the Year has assisted in raising the profile of older people and increasing knowledge about continuing opportunities for community involvement in older age.

Activities during the International Year of Older Persons in New Zealand were structured around three dates during the Year, each with its own theme. The first was 1 February, focusing on valuing the contributions of older people and productive ageing. This date coincided with the removal of an upper-age limit in New Zealand's human rights legislation, thereby prohibiting discrimination in the workplace on the basis of age. Two national conferences were held to examine the effects of these legislative changes and issues for older people in the workplace. The focus around this time was on productive ageing and valuing the contributions of older people.

On 15 May, further activities for the International Year focused on the theme of valuing relationships between young and old. The fifteenth of May is also the United Nations International Day of Families, providing an opportunity to reinforce the Government's commitment to strengthening families and valuing the role of older people in the family/*whanau*. Activities in May had an inter-generational focus. The main event was the launch of the LinkAge handbook for developing and maintaining inter-generational programmes. The handbook has been distributed to every primary and secondary school in New Zealand and to over 300 older people's and other community organizations.

Finally, on 1 October New Zealand celebrated the United Nations International Day of older Persons with activities focusing on the value of older people. The day was marked throughout New Zealand by local celebrations, displays and events, including New Zealand's contribution to the World Health Organization's Global Embrace. The Tower Senior Achievers' Awards, which recognize the contributions of older volunteers, were presented by our Governor-General at Government House in Wellington.

The New Zealand Government supported projects with a focus on positive ageing through funding to 24 community organizations throughout New Zealand. A communication strategy was undertaken aimed at increasing awareness about positive ageing and the ways in which older people do, and can continue to, contribute to the community. The Government has produced and distributed over 20,000 information kits since October 1998 to organizations throughout New Zealand. A Web site was established to provide information about the national strategy for the Year, including the key dates and themes and ideas for involvement.

An important component of this Year's observance has been the work of volunteer community coordinators in locations throughout New Zealand. These volunteers, recruited through older people's and Maori organizations, played a significant role in promoting the Year and encouraging activities in their local community.

Funding was also provided for a specific research project to investigate and identify factors which allow older people to remain independent. The research will provide recommendations for policy and service delivery.

Feedback from local communities suggests that one of the most significant outcomes from the International Year of Older Persons has been the development of new and positive relationships between different groups working together on projects and activities during the Year. It is expected that these relationships will strengthen in the future, building on the positive achievements of the Year.

My Government appreciates the support and information which has been regularly provided by the United Nations programme on ageing and, in particular, by its Director and Coordinator of the International Year of Older Persons, Alexandre Sidorenko. We congratulate the Director and his team on their fine efforts over the Year.

By valuing the contribution of older persons we empower them to play a productive and fulfilling role in our societies. We can all build on the positive achievements of the Year to continue to promote positive attitudes to ageing and older people and to ensure that the needs of our ageing populations can be met.

Mr. Šimonović (Croatia): All of us gain a lot by an extended lifetime: the young are offered a chance to grow old and the old to grow older. From everybody's point of view, demographic ageing is not a curse, but a blessing in disguise. It falls on us all to make the most of these new opportunities. Therefore, my country warmly welcomes this debate to explore together the nature and scope of

demographic ageing throughout the world and the impact it has on the individual, the family and society, as well as on economies and cultures.

My Government also strongly appreciates the efforts of the United Nations programme in preparing for the Year with the underlying theme of "A society for all ages", as well as the report of the Secretary-General presented in document A/54/268, which is central to this important issue.

As a legacy of the commemoration of the International Year of Older Persons and its innumerable activities, greater recognition has been achieved as to the far-reaching implications of demographic change throughout the world. This has led to a widespread progression from a negative view of older persons as a burden to society to a more positive perception of them as active participants whose life experience can significantly contribute to a better world.

The Republic of Croatia has also experienced a significant increase in older persons. According to the 1991 census, over 13 per cent of the population of Croatia was older than 60 years of age. However, as distinguished from other countries in which similar demographic trends were identified, Croatia faced this trend under specific conditions of economic transition complicated by the impact of war.

In addressing this challenge, a wide range of activities have begun nationally in observance of the Year, commencing with the establishment of a national committee at the beginning of 1999. In the context of commemorating the International Year of Older Persons, the national committee organized a conference focusing on the definition of goals for the strategic development of caring for older persons in the Republic of Croatia. A set of national principles was drawn up reflecting the 18 United Nations Principles for Older Persons. These recommendations outline policy development for older persons, including proposals for inaugurating a wide array of projects and activities.

Of all the recommendations that were made by the National Committee, I would like to draw the Assembly's attention to the following: the establishment of long-term mechanisms to monitor the interrelationship between aging and social and economic development; social care policies envisaged for creating an enabling environment allowing full participation and integration of older persons into society, through the provision of quality care, including health care, and access to appropriate housing facilities; measures for rural development directed at changing the trend between depopulation and ageing in certain areas by encouraging multi-generation activities.

The experience of Croatia, where the elderly constitute 20 per cent of the total number of displaced persons as a result of war, clearly demonstrates that special attention must be paid to the protection of elderly people, in addition to the protection of women, children and other vulnerable groups. Given the particular situation of Croatia, special attention has been given to older persons who are internally displaced or returnees, to facilitate their return and to enable them to resume their independent way of life.

There is no doubt that in the twenty-first century we will live longer. Whether the extension of our lifespan will be accompanied by an increase or a decrease in the quality of life for all people will depend on the quality of our preparations for this fundamental demographic and social change. It is a huge task for all of us, from the United Nations to Member States, intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations.

Investing in human development throughout our entire lifetime and supporting age-integrated social institutions are not only good ideas; they are the prerequisites for the society for all ages that all of us want to be a part of in the twenty-first century.

Ms. Arystanbekova (Kazakhstan): I have the honour to address this meeting of the General Assembly devoted to the follow-up to the International Year of Older Persons.

Like many of the previous speakers, my delegation attaches great importance to this issue. In 1982 the General Assembly endorsed the International Plan of Action on Ageing and subsequently the Assembly, in its resolution 46/91, adopted the United Nations Principles for Older Persons. This was an unprecedented and important step by the international community towards providing a broad framework for action on ageing and encouraging national Governments to incorporate these Principles into their national programmes. The Principles have made a significant contribution to improving the status of older persons worldwide and to their participation in the formulation of policies that directly affect their well-being.

The General Assembly, in order to further implement the International Plan of Action and promote adherence to the United Nations Principles for Older Persons, designated the year 1999 as the International Year of Older Persons. The Secretary-General, launching the International Year on 1 October 1998 at the United Nations Headquarters, emphasized the appropriateness of this event on the eve of the new millennium to facilitate mainstreaming older

persons' concerns and encourage activities within a long-term perspective.

Today, the United Nations has become decisively involved in this area. The report of the Secretary-General provides an in-depth analysis of what has been done by the United Nations system and national Governments to implement General Assembly resolution 53/109.

My delegation notes with great satisfaction the work of the United Nations programme on ageing, which has extended its exploration of the roles, opportunities and contributions of older persons in fast-changing societies. We consider it important that the United Nations programme is engaged in the ongoing formulation of a policy framework for a society for all ages. For my delegation, it is also important that the still-evolving policy framework encompasses four aspects: the situation of older persons, lifelong individual development, multi-generational relationships in families and communities, and the macro-societal implications of ageing. These four facets have given rise to a proactive and positive exploration of ageing in the context of its influence on the socio-economic and cultural landscape of society.

For my Government, improving the quality of life of its population, including older people, is a high priority. Kazakhstan has made significant progress towards the implementation of the action plans of the global United Nations conferences through the development of a socio-economic policy framework to foster sustainable economic growth. One of the main tasks it faces today is to create a broad and reliable system of protection of the socio-economic health of our population.

"Kazakhstan 2030", a presidential programme designed to move the country into the next millennium, formulates strategies to stimulate population growth and to further improve the health and well-being of all citizens. The programme provides for an increase in the longevity of the population through the promotion of healthy lifestyles which would help to reduce preventable diseases and substance abuse.

The National Plan of Action was elaborated by my Government in order to achieve the objectives of the International Year. The Plan contained concrete measures to offer older people an opportunity to enjoy a broad range of benefits, including medical care and old-age pensions. Practically all of our regions drew up their own action programmes. A media campaign promoting the theme "A society for all ages" covered the questions of the relationship between an individual and society; older people's involvement in social life; the maintenance of their dignity, creativity and spirituality; and the promotion of healthy lifestyles and lifelong health improvement. The observance of the International Year of Older Persons in Kazakhstan has undoubtedly raised the awareness of our society in terms of the involvement and integration of older people at all levels.

We cannot speak about the issue of the elderly without reference to population ageing, a phenomenon that impacts greatly on socio-economic policies. According to the Population Division of the Secretariat's Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the part of my country's population aged 60 years or older will have more than doubled by 2050. In the light of the rapid ageing of the population and the projected demographic shifts extending into the next century, we strongly believe that this important issue will gain even greater significance in the coming years.

We also believe that in order to adjust our societies to a new reality, the international community will have to comprehensively address the legal, fiscal, financial and labour implications of ageing. In this regard, I would like to remind the Assembly that the twenty-first special session of the General Assembly, held this year on the overall review and appraisal of the implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, also reflected the view that the early stabilization of the world population would make a crucial contribution to realizing the objective of sustainable development.

In my delegation's view, we have been able to achieve the objective of the International Year of Older Persons in raising the awareness of the fast-changing demographic picture of older people globally and in promoting action strategies to improve their integration into economic and cultural life. The role of the United Nations and its agencies is vital in this regard. Let us therefore jointly support them through our actions.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.